



A message to the faithful of the archdiocese from Archbishop Michael Jackels

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Christmas and God's answer to a BIG question

There is a category of questions I refer to as the BIG questions, for example: Is there life after death? Is suffering pointless? Am I loved?

Some people might be content just to shrug their shoulders about the first two, but all people I think want, no, need to have an answer for the last: Am I loved?

We are made by God to love, but the flip side is also true, we also want to be the object of someone's thoughts, affection, and attention.

If we are unsure about being loved – and if we are honest, most of us are – then we usually set out to buy it, trade for it, earn it, so that other people will love us.

But even if we manage to do that, it doesn't take away our anxiety about being loved, because we want to be loved without self-interest, without strings attached.

The question is, does anyone love no matter what, unconditionally, without bounds? The answer is, yes, at least one does love that way: God.

This fact and the proof of it is what brings us to Holy Mass on Christmas: the birth of Jesus.

We go to bend the knee in worship, in awe of how God drew near to us and made divinity seen, touched, and heard in the person of Jesus.

Jesus' birth, death and resurrection are expressions of a love without self-interest or strings attached, by which we are saved from sin and death, but also from the anxiety about being loved.

God answers our BIG question with a resounding yes! You are loved, in spite of yourself, whether deserving or not, with a love you can't earn or lose.

And no longer having to occupy ourselves with earning or buying love, we can then turn our attention to loving others without self-interest, without strings attached.

That is a key turning point, as caring about and caring for others is the first and most important practice of our religion: love, forgive, and give, no matter who or what, just as you are loved, forgiven, and gifted by Jesus.

Christmas, our commemoration of the birth of Jesus, is a reminder of the answer God gives to the BIG question, Am I loved?

And were we ever to forget the answer, well, the sweetness of Christmas treats, the sparkle of lights, the high holy joy of the music, and reaching out to others with cards, gifts and gatherings, all would serve as a reminder.

Am I loved? What sweetness, what sparkle, what high holy joy there is in God's answer – yes, God says, and yes, oh yes! And as God has reached out to us, to calm our deepest anxiety, so we reach out to others to bring them comfort and joy.

What a happy New Year it will be when we embrace the lesson of Merry Christmas.

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